

VZCZCXRO5409
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHMRE RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHKB #1406/01 3301250
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 261250Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4317
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNOSC/OSCE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAKU 001406

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/26/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH YOUTH MOVEMENT LEADERS

REF: BAKU 66

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANNE E. DERSE PER 1.4(B,D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On November 8, the Ambassador met with leaders of Azerbaijan's main youth movements. She noted the important role youth can play in Azerbaijan's democratic development. Representatives of the opposition movements expressed frustration that their activities are limited by pressure and restrictions from the GOAJ. They were particularly upset that at universities, opposition youth are targeted for their political beliefs, and only the ruling party is allowed to conduct activities on campuses. The pro-government and independent leaders painted a more optimistic picture, although one conceded that corruption remains an obstacle to Azerbaijan's democratic development. Azerbaijan's youth movements, like its political parties, are fractured, and thus far, unwilling to unite around common causes such as corruption in the education system. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On November 8, the Ambassador hosted a tea for leaders of Azerbaijan's main youth movements. Guests included outgoing American Alumni Association (AAA) President Fariz Ismailzade; National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (NAYORA) Chair - and Parliament's youngest member - Fuad Muradov; Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP) Youth Movement Chair Ramil Hasanov; Ireli Youth Movement Co-Founder Elnara Garibova; Dalga Youth Movement Chair Vafa Jafarova; Azerbaijan Democratic Reforms Party (ADRP) Youth Movement Chair Ramin Hajili; Young Political Ladies Movement Chair Ulviyya Gasimova; Magam Youth Movement Chair Emin Huseynov; Yox Youth Movement Chair Ali Ismayilov; Musavat Party Youth Movement Chair Ahad Mammadov; and Popular Front Party (PFP) Youth Movement active member Seymour Khaziyev. The Ambassador opened by emphasizing the importance of youth in Azerbaijan's democratic development, particularly in ensuring that the oil revenue is preserved for future generations.

¶3. (C) Magam Youth Movement Chair Emin Huseynov reflected on the youth movements' activities in the period surrounding the November 2005 parliamentary elections. While the groups had good intentions, he said, they were not sufficiently professional. Huseynov noted that the opposition youth movements had behaved like those in Ukraine and Georgia, where youth helped spur the "color" revolutions, but their efforts had been in vain. According to Huseynov, the opposition youth movements tried to address all problems and reacted to every provocation against them rather than focusing on smaller, manageable issues. He highlighted the need for greater civic engagement among youth, particularly with social problems, in order to raise the movements' public profile; otherwise, he feared that more youth will be arrested and targeted in the run-up to the October 2008 presidential election.

¶4. (C) ADRP Youth Movement Chair Ramin Hajili disagreed with

Huseynov's comment that youth movements should tackle only small problems. Rather, he said, the broader problems could be addressed by bringing in people "who know what they're doing." Hajili explained that Azerbaijan's youth movements faced both natural and artificial obstacles, many of which could be overcome by decreasing civil society's dependence on the GOAJ. He feared that the GOAJ's planned program to financially support NGOs will lead to still greater NGO dependence on the GOAJ. Hajili expressed frustration that the current state budget is fed mostly by oil revenue, not by tax-payers' dollars, resulting in a government that is not responsive to its people.

15. (C) Musavat Party Youth Movement Chair Ahad Mammadov noted that the opposition youth movements have been under a tremendous amount of pressure since the 2003 presidential election. He said that youth often become frustrated because they want immediate results from their actions, which is not realistic given the current situation in Azerbaijan. But, Mammadov said, youth must continue their fight for democratization, even if the impact is not obvious. According to Mammadov, most of Azerbaijan's youth are neither pro-government nor pro-opposition, resulting in small membership bases for the political youth movements. However, he said that the youth movements that had been successful in Ukraine and Georgia did so with relatively small groups, perhaps 200 to 300 members. "I believe in quality, not quantity," he said.

16. (C) Dalga Youth Movement Chair Vafa Jafarova expressed concern with the pressure against the independent media, noting that the situation has become very tense. She does not believe that the pressure will ease much before the 2008 presidential election, noting her expectation that the

BAKU 00001406 002 OF 003

pre-elections period will be similar to that in 2003 and 2005. Jafarova explained that many Azerbaijanis are not educated about their rights, do not understand freedom, and have no concept of civic responsibility. She said that the Dalga Youth Movement was opening democracy schools in several of Azerbaijan's regions to educate citizens on their basic rights and responsibilities. Jafarova noted a real need for an evolution in the population's mentality. (NOTE: Dalga Youth Movement is among the most active in Azerbaijan, and its members are regularly detained for staging small, creative protests focused on social problems.)

17. (C) Young Political Ladies Movement Chair Ulviyya Gasimova explained that her organization is focused on increasing political participation among young ladies and promoting gender balance. Ireli Co-Founder Elnara Garibova said that Ireli promotes civic engagement among youth, and aims to educate youth on their rights and responsibilities. She hoped the youth movements would play a more active role in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election. AAA President Fariz Ismailzade said that Azerbaijan can develop only if everyone does their part in their own specific area. He explained that he was not as pessimistic as several of the participants who had spoken before him, noting that the country was at peace and that people's basic needs were being met.

18. (C) YAP Youth Movement Chair Ramil Hasanov noted that most of the expressed opinions varied greatly from his own, but said that such discussions demonstrate that Azerbaijan is a democracy. He said that the population is generally optimistic about the future, which shows that things are going well. Hasanov said that the YAP youth movement is engaged in supporting the parent party's policies, but also in thinking about the future. According to Hasanov, the important thing was not for youth to "shout about democracy," but first to really understand democracy to be able to explain it to others. Democracy, he said, does not mean anarchy, it means rule of law. Further, President Aliyev supports democracy, Hasanov continued, and it is the youth's

"moral obligation" to support the President. Hasanov shared his movement's plans to continue organizing summer camps where youth could convey their opinions to the ruling party leadership.

¶9. (C) PFP Youth Movement member Seymour Khaziyev outlined the problems he saw with security, political freedom, and the economy. Referring to the recent security threat against the Embassy, he said that regardless of whether the threat was real, it was being used by the GOAJ to create a "sense of emergency" to justify its actions in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election. Khaziyev noted a trend of focused pressure against the opposition parties, particularly the PFP, concluding that there is no political space in which to operate. While the YAP Youth Movement is free to hold its summer camps, the opposition youth movements are in a state of decline because the GOAJ "doesn't take care of people," resulting in many youth turning to religion rather than politics. The GOAJ has spent so much of the oil revenue on infrastructural projects, he said, but has failed to invest in human capital. Khaziyev expressed frustration that opposition youth movement members are targeted at universities for their political beliefs, resulting in some students being expelled or pressured to leave on their own.

¶10. (C) NAYORA President Fuad Muradov thanked the Ambassador for the initiative, and noted the importance of the youth movements continuing such a dialogue. He said that Azerbaijani youth are hungry for greater people-to-people contacts with Americans. However, Muradov said, many young Azerbaijanis were frustrated with actions taken by the U.S. Congress, such as the attempted resolution characterizing the 1915 events in Turkey as "genocide," and section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. He said that many are displeased with the U.S. position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and noted that he would like to see U.S. cooperation in launching an "anti-terror" campaign against Armenia. Muradov explained that NAYORA is particularly active in addressing social issues such as HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, and unemployment. He conceded that corruption remains an obstacle to the youth movements, but that they can do a lot with scant resources if they set their minds to it.

¶11. (C) Yox Youth Movement Chair Ali Ismayilov said that Azerbaijan's youth are most passionate about liberating the territories occupied by Armenian forces. He believes that the GOAJ is "playing a game with the West" by imitating democracy, to which he said the international community is closing its eyes. Ismayilov raised concern that only the pro-government youth movements are able to register with the Ministry of Justice. He noted the absurdity he saw in the GOAJ creating obstacles for registration, and then, as in the

BAKU 00001406 003 OF 003

case of the three Yeni Fikir youth leaders convicted on charges of coup-plotting, using the fact that a group is not registered to accuse members of "illegal operations." Ismayilov also expressed frustration that only the YAP youth movement is allowed to hold activities on university campuses, noting that students should be encouraged, not discouraged, from joining youth movements.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: Azerbaijan's youth movements, like its political parties and NGO community, are fractured and, thus far, unwilling to unite around common causes (reftel). It is interesting that none of the youth leaders mentioned the one issue that affects nearly all of Azerbaijan's youth: corruption in the education system. Most of these youth groups have touched upon this issue in the past and, this is a competing issue that has the potential to unite Azerbaijan's youth, which seems to be largely disconnected from the political system.

DERSE